

Talk Tonight by evendanstevens

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Summary:

Hopper rewards El with a camping trip, giving Joyce a well deserved night off. But when Joyce shows up anyway, Hopper can't help but wonder why, and finds himself reflecting on all that's changed in the last six months.

Talk Tonight

Author's Note:

I went camping last weekend and felt inspired. This story ties into and mentions events that haven't yet happened in my current story 'Stay With Me Stay' but this also works well as a stand alone story. Either way, enjoy some Jopper comfort fluff! This story is mostly Jopper but there are mentions of Mileven. Post Season 2.

Title is taken from the Oasis song "Talk Tonight"

In the spring of 1985, Hopper decided to reward his adoptive daughter with a camping trip. He knew she wasn't entirely fond of the idea of another year of isolation, but they'd made it work and El had been more than well behaved. Sure there was the occasional tantrum, the occasional inanimate object telekinetically thrown across the room but things had been easier this time. He had put that down to the fact that this time El was allowed regular communication and visits with her brat pack of friends.

The idea of camping had been brought up by Dustin, his mother had just purchased him a brand spanking new tent and he was intent to try it out. Originally it was just a boys only trip, but Mike, knowing it would interfere with his weekend visit to El, had persuaded the boys to let her tag along, even suggesting Max join them to keep Lucas happy. Hopper, ever the protector, had offered to chaperone the trip, giving Joyce Byers a well-deserved night off.

"Hop, honestly, I don't mind at all!" Joyce had persisted as she rushed around her dining table, laying out cutlery and setting the table.

"C'mon, Joyce, you and I both know I'm more of the outdoorsman," Hopper had countered, following her around the table.

She snorted. "Isn't that a little sexist of you to suggest?"

"I'm sorry, which one of us an Eagle Scout again?" he raised a challenging brow at her when she turned to face him.

She rolled her eyes at him and continued to set the table. "It's not just El and Will, it's all of them I can't ask you to do that!"

"You're not asking, I'm insisting," he continued to follow the tiny woman, taking note of how quickly she was going. She had this down to an art by now. "Besides, let's be honest you need a night off."

"I do not!" she gasped at him. Hopper didn't say anything, instead he just tilted his head to the table now set for eight people. She stopped then and stared at her feet. Sighing with defeat she looked up and him, all brown eyed and shook her head at him. "Fine, but you have to promise to call me if you feel like it's too much and need my help," she stared him down, something that always amused him. That challenging look she would give him like she could honestly destroy the more-than-a-foot-taller-than-her man in front of her. He couldn't help but always smirk at that look.

He placed his left hand over his heart and held up his right hand in a small salute. "Scouts honour."

She had laughed then and whacked him playfully before calling the houseful of kids for dinner. While Jim knew she was reluctant to let him deal with the kids on his own, he could tell by the small smile Joyce kept to herself over dinner that night that she was happy and excited at the prospect of a night off to herself. He had wondered what she'd do with a night of freedom, take a long bath, read a book, have a glass of wine and a cigarette in peace, either way he'd hoped she'd finally get the peace and relaxation she deserved.

Which is why it was all the more surprising when Joyce turned up out of the blue just as the kids had started making s'mores. She had approached the group of kids and Hopper all sitting on logs around the fire with a nervous smile and quiet 'hey guys'.

Will had shouted a surprised 'Mom?!' and El had sprung up from her seat next to the Wheeler boy and ran over to Joyce to wrap her arms around her. Jim had watched as Joyce's body instantly relaxed when she returned the hug to the much younger, but not much shorter girl.

She seemed to sigh contently as she gave El a quick squeeze before she retreated back to her seat in the campfire.

“Joyce what’re you doing here? I thought we said-“

“I thought I’d come and join the fun!” Joyce had cut off Hopper with an overenthusiastic exclamation and met his eyes for only a second.

A second was all he needed. In the warm orange glow of the fire, Hopper noticed the puffiness around Joyce’s eyes and caught her sniff ever so slightly. She had been crying.

Joyce sat herself down next to him in the spare space to the right of him on the log and kept her eyes on the kids playfully arguing about who had the most marshmallows.

“Joyce-“

“Don’t, Hop,” she cut him off in a hiss through her teeth. Her eyes then lifted to Will and Hopper understood. Whatever it was that had made Joyce upset, whatever it was that had made Joyce skip out on her night off, she didn’t want Will to know about it.

So instead of pestering her for an explanation, Hopper and Joyce decided to distract themselves by watching the kids in front of them. Hopper paid particular attention to Will and El. When El had returned from opening the gate and Will was himself again, she had immediately ran to him and pulled him into an embrace that Will awkwardly reciprocated. The two kids had never actually officially met, they had never spoken to one another but the shared trauma between them was enough to build an unspoken understanding.

After that, the pair were more or less inseparable. While they loved spending time with the party playing board games and riding their bikes and watching movies, sometimes Will and El liked to spend time quietly in each other’s company. They both knew what it was like to be different from their friends, in one way or another. They were the quieter two of the group, yet they both felt a protectiveness over each other which neither of them could really explain.

Hopper had been confused by it at first, this sudden closeness

between the two, and he had always thought El liked Mike. But Joyce had spotted it straight away because of course she did. She had explained it to Hopper one day when his concealed confusion had reached a breaking point. She pointed it out to Hopper that El and Will saw each other as brother and sister, two kids that had found themselves forced to grow up in the midst of monsters and opposing dimensions. When Joyce had said that he had felt a lightbulb go off in his head.

So now Hopper and Joyce watched as their kids mused over the marshmallows perched on their respective sticks. When El watched her marshmallow burn she turned to Mike next to her and furrowed her brows in irritated disappointment, thinking she'd done something wrong despite doing the exact same thing as her friends had done. Hopper couldn't help but laugh when Mike had reached over and pulled off the now burnt and crispy shell that caused El's face to light up in realisation and amazement.

The girl had just fought off a monster and closed an interdimensional gate not five months before, and here she was utterly amazed by a gooey marshmallow.

Later the kids all decided to share ghost stories. Despite everything they had been through, facing literal monsters and horror, the kids still couldn't help but get scared by a good old fashioned spooky tale. Lucas had been half way through a story when Hopper noticed El holding Mike's hand, her side pressed up against his. Joyce seemed to notice it too when she nudged Hopper and looked up at him with those bright, knowing brown eyes, a little smile on her face. Normally, Hopper was rather protective when it came to El and Mike, while he knew Mike would never in his damn life even think about hurting her in anyway, in his eyes El was his little girl now. She had been deprived of a proper childhood, shut out from the world and all things innocent, and he didn't want her growing up too fast, not just yet.

But even Jim Hopper couldn't deny that it was a sweet moment. He remembered how Mike had lashed out when he'd found out the truth. How the scrawny, small boy had bashed against Hopper's chest, ready to take on a man more than half his size in his anger and sadness. He remembered how all he could do was hold the kids while

he let out his frustrations, letting him cry and shake in his arms. Hopper had told him he was sorry, and he had meant it. He knew there had been something between the pair of them by the way El had spoken about him. He just didn't know the full extent till the boy who loved her wept for a love he believed to have lost right in front of him.

So just for tonight, Hopper would allow the hand holding and closeness. After all, this trip was meant to be a reward for her, and he'd be damned if he was going to ruin it.

So instead, Hopper turned his attention back to Joyce, who was now back to listening to Lucas' story. But he could tell by the look in her eyes that Joyce's mind was far away. He wondered if she was thinking of Bob. He knew that the memories of that night still haunted her. While Will had slowly but surely readjusted to practically his old self, Hopper still got the occasional phone call from Jonathan, alerting him that Joyce had locked herself away in her room again, or that she wasn't speaking, or that she was screaming and crying in her sleep. Hopper had gone to her every time. Sometimes he would hold her and let her cry it out, sometimes they would sit and talk through it for hours on end, and sometimes he would just sit with her in silence, his presence enough to calm her down. He just wanted to be there for her in any way that he could.

Lucas' suddenly yelled the climax of his story causing Max and Dustin to scream in fright, Mike remained unmoved and brave as El and Will responded with a startled eyebrow raise and quiet gasp of fright. Hopper chuckled at the kids but noticed Joyce remained still and unresponsive to her surroundings.

Hopper was set to leave her alone in thought for a moment before he saw Will turn around and look at her. Jim could feel the worry on the kid's face as Will looked between his mother and then Hopper. Hopper gave him a look as if to say 'I've got this' and that was enough to make Will relax and return his attention to his friends. As unpleasant the circumstances were, Jim was glad he had the kid's trust.

“Will likes you,” El had said with an out of character sense of confidence one day as Hopper drove them back to the cabin.

Hopper had raised a brow in surprise. “Oh really? What makes you say that?”

El sighed and looked out the window as she normally did when she was tired. “He said I was lucky to have you as a papa,” she had said quietly, resting her head against the window. Jim didn’t say anything as he felt a warm feeling of pride swell in his chest. He’d always liked Will, he was different to kids his age, sure, but the kid was polite and kind and considerate, despite being through hell and back. Jim had admired him for that, and while he wouldn’t admit it, he had begun to see Will as his own child, same as El.

“What happened to Will’s dad? I asked Mike but he didn’t want to talk about it.”

The question had knocked Hopper sideways. How did he even begin to explain the scumbag that was Lonnie Byers?

“Will’s dad is not a very nice man,” was the best Hopper could come up with. “He was mean to Will, and to Jonathan. He’s not around anymore.”

“He died?” El’s head had come back from the window and was now looking up at Hopper with curious eyes.

Hopper had shaken his head. “No, hon,” Hopper sighed then and felt his hand grip the steering wheel. “He left Joyce a couple of years ago, he walked out on her and the kids. He hurt her.”

El had gasped, her big eyes widening even more as she turned away from Hopper and looked straight ahead. “Who could ever hurt Joyce?” she had said in almost a whisper, like the question hadn’t been meant for Hopper but more so she was thinking out loud.

“A monster, kid, that’s who,” Jim didn’t realise his words had come out through gritted teeth until El looked up at him with a surprised expression. She had looked at him like a lightbulb had gone off in her head, but whatever realisation she had had, she kept it to herself

before she leaned her head against the window. She had fallen asleep before they got home and Jim had carried her into the cabin.

After Lucas had finished his story, the red head girl Max had let out a contagious yawn, and while the kids had tried to fight it, it was clear it was time for bed. Hopper wasn't sure how they managed to fit the six of them into what looked to be such a small tent, but they fit nonetheless, all nestled in their sleeping bags with nothing but an overhead torch to light up their surroundings. He knew the light was for El's benefit, who still had a fear of the dark after her time in Hawkins Lab. He made the same note to himself that he had made several times; El sure had a good group of friends.

But as he turned his attention from the kids in the tent and back to Joyce, he noticed that while she did look more relaxed, there was a tension in her tiny frame that he was determined to get to the bottom of.

He waited until the chatter in the kids tent had died down before he reached into his bag at his feet and pulled out the bottle of bourbon he had packed with him in case the kids had been a little too much for his head to handle. A large part of him knew he hadn't needed it, after all he'd severely cut down on his alcohol consumption after finding El in the woods, but having it with him somehow comforted him, even if he didn't take a sip. But he was glad he'd brought it now, Joyce looked like she needed it.

He silently offered it to her with a tilt of the bottle but Joyce shook her head, holding up her hand.

"No, Hop, I can't I need to drive home," Joyce refused but Jim was already digging out two cups from his duffel bag.

"Joyce, it's dark and it's late," he observed as he poured two small measurements. "I have a spare sleeping bag, you're not going anywhere," he assured as he handed her a cup.

She didn't put up a fight to that and shakily took the cup from him and took a sip.

"And something tells me you don't really want to go home..." Hopper

insinuated and gave her a look as if to encourage her to tell him.

Instead she didn't look at him she simply took another sip and stared ahead at the dying embers of the fire in front of them. When she looked down at her cup and pulled her knees closer together, digging the soles of her shoes into the dirt, he thought she was going to tell him then.

"Do you know what this reminds me of?" Joyce said with a smile. She didn't let him answer. "That night of the bonfire in senior year."

Jim couldn't help but return her smile as he chuckled fondly, remembering the night all of a sudden like it was yesterday. "We were absolutely shitfaced off my dad's whiskey," he rubbed a hand over his face as he recalled it.

Joyce giggled. "It tasted like shit," she shook her head.

"Did the job though," he nudged Joyce with a shrug of his right shoulder. "You were so wasted you started mocking the cheerleader's routine with your own." Joyce couldn't help but snort which resorted in Jim returning a laugh. "I swear more people were watching you than they were the actual cheerleaders."

Joyce let out an amused sigh and smirked up at Hopper. "And then Chrissy Carpenter called me a crazy bitch," Jim could only nervously chuckle at that.

"And then you ran off crying but I went running after you," Hopper reminded her with a gentle smile that only made colour run to her cheeks and her eyes tear away from his and back to the fire. She took another sip that finished the cup. Jim polished off his drink in return and reached for the bottle and refilled for them. "Y'know Joyce, I was there for you way back then. And I'm still here for you now," he looked down at her noticed her eyes shift towards him, almost considering telling him. But then she looked away with another sip.

"I still can't believe you dated that girl," Joyce muttered with a laugh, as if Hopper had said nothing.

And just like that they were back to reminiscing. They talked for a

good hour about high school and their childhoods, drinking bourbon and sharing cigarettes like they were teenagers again. They didn't talk about anything that took place after the day of graduation, Jim had left town the day after. As they drank and laughed about their past, Hopper watched and Joyce's wide smile came back to her and her eyes sparkled.

Hopper felt a warm feeling rush through him whenever Joyce let out a whooping laugh, or whenever her smile reached her eyes. He loved spending alone time with Joyce, most especially when Joyce was like this, care free and happy. He knew that she deserved to be like this, she deserved to relax and let her hair down and even behave like a teenager again from time to time. While Hopper had been concerned that she was missing out on a night out of relaxation, when she had looked up at him with a grin on her face he was glad she had joined him. But really he was happy any time he got to spend time with her.

Truth was, Hopper had stopped denying his growing feelings for Joyce Byers for some time now. He wasn't sure when it was that he'd realised he was in love with her, but he had guiltily admitted it to himself that it was when she was dating Bob. He had ran into them one night when he'd swung by the diner to pick some wings to watch the Sunday night football game. It was his first time showing El a football game so he figured he'd do it right. As he was waiting for his food, he'd glanced over the diner and caught sight of Bob and Joyce in the corner laughing over their dinner.

He had spotted the large dollop of spaghetti sauce at the side of Joyce's mouth all the way from the bar. He had smiled to himself then, she looked like a total goof but adorable as always, if not more than usual. He had felt an overwhelming need to go over to her and wipe it away with his thumb and even felt his legs begin to move towards the couple. But he felt his heart fall into the pit of his stomach when he watched as Bob reached over and did what Jim had longed to do. Joyce's cheeks had flushed with embarrassment but the way she looked up at Bob through her long lashes, she looked astoundingly beautiful. Suddenly all of Jim's plans to go over and talk to her had flown out the window and he simply picked up his order and left, his mind never leaving the thought of Joyce the whole drive home.

It had only become more clear to him when he was trapped in the tunnels. Thinking he was going to die, he found himself thinking of everything in his life that held any meaning to him, wishing he had done it all differently. He thought of Diane and Sara, how there was nothing he really could have done to stop what happened, he regretted how he had handled it. He thought of El, how she had yelled at how she hated him and if he was honest, he hated himself for losing it at her. Truth was he loved the kid like she was his own. But Hopper was Hopper and he had a stupid way of showing it.

And then his mind had gone to Joyce, surprisingly thinking more of their relationship in the present day rather than the happier days of their whirlwind high school romance. Back in high school, Hopper had everything going for him, sure Joyce had been a part of it but now... now she was the bright light in the dark that had become his life. He was grateful for her, he was amazed by her, he was happy to have her. He was in love with her.

And then he had heard her voice. Her screams of his name had echoed through the walls of the tunnels and Hopper had been sure he had hallucinated it. But then he'd felt the pressure of the vine wrapped around his neck begin to lift, everything happened so fast and after he'd cut the vines from him and came to his feet the first thing he felt was two hands on the side of his face and he looked into the dimly light but the distinguishable brown eyes baring into his own as she looked for any indication injury or illness.

She had ventured into hell for *him*.

From then on Jim was a goner.

"Lonnie called," Joyce's voice brought him out of his trance and now he was all ears. He had turned to her then and her eyes were on the ground. The happiness had left her face and her nail was dragging against her cup with nerves.

"Jesus, what did he say?" Hopper looked at her with concern strewn across his face.

She sighed and took a drink for her cup. "He wants to see me and the boys. He keeps talking about moving back to Hawkins." She realised

her mistake after the words had left her mouth and she turned her face away from Jim so he couldn't read her expression.

"Hold on, *keeps?!'*" Hopper almost exclaimed as his eyebrows hit the sky.

"He's been calling for about two weeks now."

"*Two weeks?!'*" Hopper shouted that made Joyce jump and she turned to face him in shame. The saddened frown that plagued her face sent pity through him. His expression immediately softened but he still couldn't help but feel irritated. "Joyce why didn't you tell me? I would've--"

"Would've what, Hop?" her voice was cutting and she glared at him. "Drove to Indianapolis and punched Lonnie into leaving me alone?!"

"If that's what it took then yeah!" Hopper said automatically. He realised how stupid it had sounded and Joyce's glare fell into a look of confusion. Hopper sighed. "Do you think he's really going to come back to Hawkins?"

Joyce didn't say anything and instead looked back to the ground when the realisation hit him.

"That's why you didn't want to stay at home alone... you believe him," Hopper pinched the bridge of his nose. "Joyce, I'm sure he didn't--"

"He's done stuff like this before," she said quietly. Her voice small and sad. "After he left, there were times when he'd show up and yell at the boys, demanding to come back into our lives. And when I would say no he..." her voice trailed off and Hopper didn't need her to say anymore. He instinctively put an arm around her and rubbed her back soothingly.

"Joyce you should've called me. Why didn't you call me?" Hopper murmured trying to keep his calm, he didn't want to pressure her into answering him, but at the same time he wanted to know why she wouldn't tell him. It was to his understanding that they could go to each other about anything these days, so what was different about

this time?

Joyce shook her head and closed her eyes, like she was reluctant to say what she was about to say. "Because I don't want you to look at me the way you are right now," she admitted. Hopper froze. "After Bob," Joyce opened her eyes but didn't look at him. "You were there for me, but you didn't pity me. You understood that what I wanted was to feel normal, and you did just that. You have no idea how much I needed that and how much I appreciated it." She paused for a moment before pulling out a cigarette and lighting it. She took a drag and passed it to Hopper who copied her action before passing it back to her.

"Do you remember that time Will called you to the house?" Joyce asked before taking a drag. Hopper was about to ask her what time. "I'm not talking about after everything's that happened. I mean when you first became Chief."

Hopper dipped his head. He remembered it, he'd never forgotten it. Flo had radioed him that a young boy had called the station that his daddy was going to kill his mommy and when she had read him the address Hopper's foot practically hit the floor on the accelerator of his Blazer. He'd raced to the Byers' home but by the time he'd gotten there whatever altercation had transpired, it was over. When Hopper arrived at the house, a then twelve year old Jonathan had answered the door. He had looked confused at first, but then he had looked at a terrified Will poking his head round the corner and Jonathan put two and two together. Jonathan didn't say anything and stepped aside to let Hopper into the house.

From what Hopper could tell, Lonnie was gone. He found Joyce sitting down at the kitchen table, shakily smoking a cigarette. A fresh red mark on her cheek bone.

"That wasn't the first time that had happened. It wasn't the first time Lonnie had hurt me and it wasn't the last time. But every time he..." Joyce went quiet, Hopper gave her back a gentle rub, encouraging her to continue but at her own pace. "Every time he hurt me, I shook it off. I told myself I was doing it for the boys, I had to be brave for them. But I couldn't look in the mirror. I could try and make myself forget, but I couldn't look at the physical marks he'd left." She

nudged him slightly. "And then you came that night. And you looked at with so much pity and sadness and suddenly you were this giant mirror I couldn't avoid. The way you looked at me just reminded me of how fucked up things got after you left," she sniffed and handed the cigarette back to Hopper. "I couldn't ignore that look on your face. And just like that I couldn't ignore what my life had become. I couldn't ignore the choice I'd made to marry him, I couldn't ignore the choice I'd made to leave y..." and then Joyce was crying and Hopper's heart was breaking. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you, Hop, I'm so sorry," she wept as she hid her face in her hands.

"Joyce, no, please don't," Hopper threw his cigarette away and wrapped her fully in his arms, tightly pulling her to him, her face hidden against his chest. Hopper himself felt like crying. He hated seeing Joyce like this. He'd seen a lot of it after Bob but that had been grief. She was crying out of guilt now, crying out of a past she couldn't escape no matter how hard she tried. All he could do right now was hold her, and hope that that was enough. "You don't ever have to apologise to me, Joyce. *Ever*," he squeezed her tight against him to emphasise his words.

She pulled away from him then, having calmed down a little and wiped away her stray tears. She let out a small laugh. "I'm sorry..." she muttered and Jim smiled a little. Trust her to disregard what he *just* said. "I hate being so weak."

"Well that's bullshit," Jim shrugged and she looked up at him confused. "Joyce, you're raising two teenage boys practically on your own, you work two jobs, you went up against a literal fucking monster and you ventured into hell twice without thinking twice about it," he moved down then and crouched in front of her, taking her two shaky hands in his own. She dipped her head but looked up at him through her lashes and he gave her a soft, reassuring smile. "And even when those monsters took someone from you, someone you cared about," her eyes left his then and looked down sadly. "You still made sure and went out of your way to make sure everyone else was okay. I mean who even does that?!" Jim shook his head in disbelief. "Hey look at me," he took one of his hand and delicately placed it on her cheek. Her eyes hesitantly met his. "You are the strongest person I know, Joyce," he stared up at her in complete awe

that brought a nervous smile to her lips. “You have so much strength you don’t even know you have.”

She looked away then back at him with a shrug. “What do I do if Lonnie comes back?” she whispered, shyly.

“Then I will be there, Joyce,” he firmly stated, almost shouting. “I will be right there next to you when you tell him to his stupid face to fuck right off,” he smiled slightly at her and she let out a small laugh. “And I’ll even kick his ass if that’s what you want,” he raised an eyebrow at her.

Joyce was chuckling gently. “I may just hold you to that,” she sighed happily.

He considered kissing her then. It would have been easy for him to reach up and lightly brush her lips with his own. He wanted to, god did he want to. He’d thought about how he would do it for months now. But as he looked at her tear stained cheeks and red, tired eyes, he knew the time wasn’t right. Maybe the time would never be right, he had no idea how she felt about him. But when she smiled at him, that little spark of hope began to burn within him.

Chemistry, history, shared trauma.

She looked over his shoulder then and noticed the fire was barely burning now. “I think the fire’s dead.”

Jim looked over his shoulder and took his hands from Joyce and stood up. “Yeah we should probably hit the hay.” As Joyce tidied up their surroundings, Hopper went to his car and pulled out the spare sleeping bag he’d brought with him, over prepared as per usual. When he got back he gestured to her to follow him into the tent. She offered to sleep in her car but Hopper insisted.

When they settled in their respective sleeping bags, Jim had expected Joyce to immediately fall asleep. But then she spoke, taking Hopper by surprise.

“Hop,” Joyce’s voice came through the dark. She was lying with her back to him whilst he lay on his back staring up at the ceiling tent.

He made a 'hmpf' noise in response to let her know he was still awake. "Could you hold me for a minute?" her voice was quiet and sounded far from needy. It was just sad and exhausted and Hopper didn't think twice before he unzipped his bag at the side and shuffled over to Joyce.

The unzipped side of the bag allowed him to wrap his arms around Joyce's encased body. It was an awkward position with Joyce wrapped in her sleeping bag so after a minute, she unzipped the sleeping bag and pushed it down to her stomach. She rolled to turn and face Hopper but didn't meet his eyes. Instead she wrapped her arms around his chest and pulled herself close to him, burying her face into his chest. He impulsively bent his head down and kissed the top of her head and let out a shaky breath.

"Thank you," Joyce whispered.

"Anytime," Hopper simply said in return.

As Joyce drifted to sleep, Hopper found himself struggling to maintain a regular breathing pattern. He felt like a dumb kid again, unable to breathe in the close proximity to a girl. And while he wasn't a kid anymore, Joyce wasn't just any girl. This was woman he felt he loved for over twenty years now, his feelings simply dormant whilst he'd been away from Hawkins, reawakening after the horror they'd faced together. And while he'd had many women in that time and slept with them, he'd never really slept with them before, not since Diane. It felt like decades ago.

But while the concept of holding Joyce like this while she slept was a foreign one, it was a welcome one in itself. And it wasn't one he was willing to shy away to anytime soon. As sleep began to take him, Hopper tried to remember the last time he was this content and comfortable. And as he listened to Joyce's soft breathing, verging on a light snore, he found himself smiling, perfectly happy.

"I love you, Joyce," Hopper whispered against her hair as he kissed her head once again before falling asleep.

Too tired to notice Joyce's eyes fly open at the revelation.